

NCA  
VOC FOR PGM/FN  
BACKGROUNDER NO. 5-5921  
DAVID LENT/ROME

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# LEONE RESIGNATION

ANNCR:

THE RESIGNATION OF ITALIAN PRESIDENT GIOVANNI LEONE ON THURSDAY JUNE 15 HAS UNDERLINED THE NATURE OF THE RELATIONSHIPS WHICH HAVE GROWN UP BETWEEN ITALY'S RULING CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATS AND ITS SECOND LARGEST PARTY, THE COMMUNIST. VOA'S DAVID LENT IN ROME EXAMINES THE POLITICAL SCENE FOLLOWING THE LATEST DEVELOPMENT.

VOICE:

THE MOST SIGNIFICANT POLITICAL ASPECT OF PRESIDENT LEONE'S RESIGNATION IS THAT IT HAS N O T CREATED A CRISIS ATMOSPHERE HERE IN ROME. DESPITE THE INHERENTLY MOMENTOUS NATURE OF SUCH AN EVENT, MISTER LEONE'S QUICK RIDE TO POLITICAL OBSCURITY IS N O T EXPECTED TO CAUSE THE DOWNFALL OF THE GOVERNMENT NOR A CRUMBLING OF THE POLITICAL ALLIANCE THAT KEEPS IT ALIVE.

QUITE TO THE CONTRARY, THE COMMUNISTS, WHO PROVIDE THE ESSENTIAL PARLIAMENTARY SUPPORT FOR THE MINORITY CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATIC GOVERNMENT, HELD OFF UNTIL THE CLAMOR FOR THE CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATIC PRESIDENT'S RESIGNATION HAD BECOME IRRESISTIBLE BEFORE JOINING IN. AND THE CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATS APPEARED TO ACCEDE TO THE PRESSURE WITH SOME RELIEF. THE RESIGNED PRESIDENT HAD BEEN A SOURCE OF EMBARRASSMENT TO THE CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATS FOR SOME TIME. HIS NAME HAS BEEN LINKED WITH MAJOR FIGURES NOW ON TRIAL ON BRIBERY CHARGES, CONNECTED WITH PAYMENTS TO ITALIAN OFFICIALS BY THE LOCKHEED AIRCRAFT COMPANY.

THE SOLIDITY, AT LEAST FOR THE TIME BEING, OF THE POLITICAL ALLIANCE BETWEEN ITALY'S TWO LARGEST PARTIES, BECAME CLEAR DURING THE FIFTY-FOUR DAY AGONY FOLLOWING THE KIDNAPPING OF ALDO MORO. THE COMMUNISTS WERE MOST FIRM IN REJECTING ANY NEGOTIATIONS WITH THE RED BRIGADES TERRORISTS IN AN EFFORT TO SAVE THE LIFE OF THE FORMER PRIME MINISTER. MISTER MORO WAS THE CHIEF ARCHITECT OF THE AGREEMENT WHICH, FOR THE FIRST TIME IN THIRTY YEARS, BROUGHT THE COMMUNIST PARTY FORMALLY INTO THE PARLIAMENTARY MAJORITY SUPPORTING THE GOVERNMENT.

THE SOLIDITY OF THE ALLIANCE WAS DEMONSTRATED ONCE AGAIN WHEN THE LEADERSHIP OF THE CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATIC AND COMMUNIST PARTIES USED PRACTICALLY IDENTICAL ARGUMENTS URGING THEIR VOTERS TO REJECT REPEAL OF TWO LAWS IN A NATIONWIDE REFERENDUM. AND NOW THERE IS A GATHERING MOMENTUM HERE IN ROME FOR DEFACTO CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATIC-COMMUNIST TEAMWORK IN THE SELECTION OF A PRESIDENT TO REPLACE MISTER LEONE.

THE RESIGNATION FORMALLY OPENED UP THE POSSIBILITY OF PARLIAMENTARY ELECTION. MISTER LEONE WAS ENTERING THE FINAL SIX MONTHS OF HIS SEVEN YEAR TERM WHEN FORCED FROM OFFICE, AND THE CONSTITUTION FORBIDS DISSOLUTION OF PARLIAMENT AND NEW ELECTIONS DURING THIS PERIOD. BUT IN THE ATMOSPHERE OF COOPERATION BETWEEN THE COUNTRY'S TWO LARGEST PARTIES, AGREEMENT ON A PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE COUPLED WITH AGREEMENT TO MAINTAIN THE PRESENT POLITICAL ALLIANCE AT LEAST UNTIL THE END OF THE YEAR IS MORE LIKELY.

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